DEFINING GROUP FACILITATION

The definition of “facilitate” is “to make easy; lessen the labor of; help forward a process” (World Book Dictionary, 2004). When applied to groups, to facilitate means to make the group of the work easier and more effective. Here is our formal definition of group facilitation:

Group facilitation is what a leader says or does to create an experiential and relational environment in which diverse individuals develop as a group.

This definition can be divided into distinct statements referring to different conceptual bases:

- Facilitation skills promote experiential learning.
- Group facilitation addresses the needs of diverse individuals.
- Facilitation guides groups through different stages of development.
- Facilitative leadership fosters inclusive, empowering, purposeful, ethical, and process-oriented relationships within a group.
- Facilitative leadership fosters an inclusive and non-hierarchical approach to the educational process.

Facilitation skills are not synonymous with teaching and classroom management, or attending skills. The traditional teaching dynamic posits the teacher/leader as the expert and students as recipients of externally-located knowledge. The unilateral transmission of ideas from teacher to student often fails to engage students by focusing on the product rather than the process of education. Experiential learning, which emphasizes the fluid nature of knowledge in relation to social contexts, is dynamic, multidirectional, and inclusive. Experiential facilitation includes being able to move from being a “sage on the stage” to being a “guide on the side.”

Attending and listening skills are essential to the creation of positive interpersonal relations in any context. Examples of these skills include: active listening, attending and encouraging, open questions, closed questions, paraphrasing and summarizing. While these communication skills provide the cornerstone of any positive interaction, they are more generalized than facilitation skills, which are used specifically in the creation of productive group dynamics.
THEORETICAL FRAMEWORKS

Experiential Learning Theory (Kolb, 1984)
Kolb (1984) described four modes of learning that create a comprehensive cycle of learning.
- **Concrete Experience** - engaging in active, task-oriented behavior (FEELING).
- **Reflective Observation** – carefully noticing what has been done (WATCHING).
- **Abstract Conceptualization** - theorizing about what has been observed (THINKING).
- **Active Experimentation** - hands-on practice and trial-and-error learning (DOING).

Individual Learning Styles (Kolb, 1984; McCarthy, 1990)
David Kolb (1984) identified four groups of learners based on their preferences for different modes of learning. Kolb originally described the four groups as Divergers, Assimilators, Convergers, and Accommodators and related these learning styles to the ideas of Piaget and Dewey. Bernice McCarthy (1990) relabeled the categories as Imaginative, Analytic, Common Sense, and Dynamic Learners. Different individuals have preferences for different modes of learning.

**Imaginative Learners** - prefer concrete experience and reflective observation
- Oriented toward concrete experience and reflective observation
- Strengths in imaginative ability and awareness of meaning and values
- Learn best when they are given the opportunity to reflect on their own experience
- Construction of personal meaning is important for engaging in the learning process
- Thrive in environments that encourage personal involvement and interpersonal interaction

**Analytic Learners** - prefer reflective observation and abstract conceptualization
- Oriented toward abstract conceptualization and reflective observation
- Strengths in inductive reasoning and creating theoretical models
- Devise theories by integrating their observations into what they know
- Learn by thinking through ideas and construct hypotheses as the basis for learning
- Value expert knowledge and quantitative data
- Thrive in learning environments that encourage reflection, analysis, and conceptualization

**Common Sense Learners** - prefer abstract conceptualization and active experimentation
- Oriented toward abstract conceptualization and active experimentation
- Strengths in problem solving, decision making, and practical application
- Integrate theory and practice, learning by testing theories and applying common sense
- Desire to put new information to immediate practical use
- Want to be involved in the process of hands-on learning that involves experimenting
- Thrive in environments that allows direct involvement, practice, and active experimentation

**Dynamic Learners** - prefer active experimentation and concrete experience
- Oriented toward concrete experience and active experimentation
- Strengths related to carrying out plans, taking action, and getting involved
- Integrate experience and application, learning by trial and error
• Desire to know how to apply any new information they learn to "real life"
• Want to take knowledge and experience with them and learn on their own
• Thrive in learning environments that build a bridge from learning to application and point to ways in which they can actively use learning to further their own personal experience

**Four Stages of Group Facilitation (Brooks-Harris & Stock-Ward, 1999)**

• **Engaging Workshop Participants in Active Learning** – emphasizes concrete experience and reflective observation; corresponds to the needs of imaginative learners.
• **Informing the Group with Relevant Knowledge** – encourages reflective observation and abstract conceptualization; corresponds to the needs of analytic learners.
• **Involving the Group in Interactive Participation** – emphasizes abstract conceptualization and active experimentation; corresponds to the needs of common sense learners.
• **Planning for Future Application** – encourages active experimentation and concrete experience; corresponds to the needs of dynamic learners.

**Stages of Group Development (Tuckman, 1965)**
Bruce Tuckman (1965) originally described four stages of group development that describe both interpersonal relationships and task activities. These stages in order of development are:

• **Forming:** The group comes together for the first time or re-forms in a new way. Interpersonal relationships are characterized by “testing and dependence” and the discovery of which interpersonal behaviors are acceptable in a group setting.
• **Storming:** Intra-group conflict as members resist the formation of group structure and attempt to express their own individuality. Members may react emotionally to the group and resist demands placed on individuals.
• **Norming:** Resolution of group conflicts that lead to the development of group cohesion. Having learned important lessons during the storming stage, norming is characterized by mutual acceptance and a sense of harmony.
• **Performing:** The group becomes a “problem-solving instrument.” Members have learned how to work together to accomplish group goals. Individuals have found ways to play to their strengths and to complement the efforts of others.

**Multicultural Education Theory and Practice (Bennett, 2003)**
Intentional group conditions promote positive social and educational contact.

• **Sufficiently intimate contact** produces reciprocal knowledge and understanding between groups and individuals.
• **Equal status shared** by members of various groups.
• **Inter-group cooperation** required to achieve a common goal.
• **Institutional support** through authority and/or social climate encourages inter-group contact.
FOUR STAGES OF GROUP FACILITATION

1. Engaging Group Members in Active Learning

The first stage of group facilitation is welcoming and inviting members into a group. Engaging skills encourage individuals to feel included and valued within the group context. The arrows in the figure indicate the way a leader (L) invites members (M) into a group.

Engaging skills start by affirming what members already know. Engaging skills are often used at the beginning of a group or when a new topic is introduced. Engaging group members in active learning helps members accomplish these three learning tasks:

- Reflecting on personal experience
- Preparing for active participation and learning
- Recognizing an appropriate group role for oneself

2. Informing the Group with Relevant Knowledge

The second stage of group facilitation is to provide information that will help the group achieve its goals. Informing facilitation skills manage the flow of information inside the group. The arrows indicate that during the informing stage, the leader usually takes an active role in managing the flow of information to the members.

Informing skills add knowledge to help participants expand their awareness. Informing skills can provide outside information in the form of theories, data, and facts, or can inform the group about itself or inform members about themselves. Informing the group with relevant knowledge often involves helping members accomplish these three learning tasks:

- Assimilating new information
- Conceptualizing one’s own experience with new knowledge
- Teaching what you already know to support group learning
3. **Involving the Group in Interactive Participation**

The third stage of group facilitation encourages interaction and participation that results in active learning and productivity. Involving facilitation skills create an opportunity for active experimentation and allow the group to put new knowledge to practical use. The arrows suggest that interaction between members is very important during this stage.

Involving skills provide an opportunity for group members to practice and involve themselves in new behaviors, skills, and knowledge. A group should provide a safe environment to try out new things in preparation for applying them outside in the “real world.” Involving skills are often paired with informing skills so that new knowledge can be put to practical use. Involving the group in interactive participation helps members accomplish these three learning tasks:

- **Experimenting** with new knowledge and behavior
- **Practicing** skills to improve performance
- **Interacting** with others to support participatory learning

4. **Planning for Future Application**

The final stage of group facilitation focuses on planning and involves considering multiple possibilities, making good choices, and creating specific plans for the future. Planning ensures that a group’s energy and impact does not dissolve as soon as the group adjourns. The arrows in the figure indicate that the flow of energy during this stage is toward application outside of the group learning environment.

Planning skills are often used at the conclusion of a workshop or when the focus of the group is about to shift from one topic to another. Planning skills allow learners to complete a learning cycle and “take the group with them.” Planning for future application often involves helping group members accomplish these three learning tasks:

- **Setting goals** based on group learning
- **Planning** for specific personal action
- **Applying** lessons from the group to other contexts
Notes on the Four Stages of Group Facilitation

These stages are presented in an order that may represent an ideal sequence of group facilitation based on Kolb’s (1984) experiential learning cycle. A group gathering should almost always start with an attempt to engage members in a group process. Engaging often involves reflecting on past experience. In an exemplary group, the facilitator can then move on to information followed by active involvement in order to put learning into practice. Most group interactions should conclude by looking forward and planning for the future. However, in actual practice these stages are only roughly sequential and group facilitation may jump from stage to stage and back depending on the situation.

These four emphases can be viewed as both “micro” and “macro” stages of group facilitation. A group leader should attend to four micro-stages of facilitation every time the group gathers. Every meeting or other gathering should start with engagement and conclude with planning. Informing and involving should be the focus of the middle of most group interactions. Some student groups are self-contained and have a short “life-span.” A one-time-only campus workshop may result in an assembly of individuals who only become a group once. For example, a group of freshman during orientation may spend a lot of time together for a short period of time and then disperse. For these short-term groups, it is essential to attend to micro-stages of group facilitation.

For groups that stay together over the course of weeks, months, or years, a group leader also should attend to four macro-stages of facilitation. These stages can act as a guide for development across the life of a group. For student groups, it may be helpful to think of these group processes occurring over the course of a semester or an academic year. At the beginning of the year, it is vital to attend to group engagement. During the middle of the year, informing and involving may be the focus of your facilitation energy. At the end of the year, you can spend more time and energy planning for the future. As you think about your role as a group leader, you should consider how to enact micro-stages of facilitation during every group interaction as well as how to manage group interactions over the macro-stages that evolve over weeks or months.
GROUP FACILITATION SKILLS FOR EDUCATIONAL EFFECTIVENESS

For each of the four stages of group facilitation, the authors have identified five individual skills that exemplify helpful leadership behaviors. Each of these clusters of skills offers a flexible and holistic approach to facilitation and should not be viewed as an exhaustive catalog. A group leader can learn and practice these skills and, eventually, facilitation should become more fluid and appear almost seamless.

Engaging Facilitation Skills

- **Demonstrating Leadership** – letting the group know who’s in charge
- **Creating an Open Environment** – inviting people to be a part of the group
- **Encouraging Connections** – helping people get acquainted and connected
- **Building Group Rapport** – facilitating a sense of teamwork and unity
- **Defining Group Identity** – establishing the group purpose and personality

Informing Facilitation Skills

- **Providing Information** – presenting facts, resources, knowledge, theories, or data
- **Gathering Information and Exchanging Knowledge** – asking questions, gathering data, surveying ideas, and encouraging the exchange of information
- **Clarifying Ideas or Concepts** – making sure everyone is on the same wavelength
- **Conceptualizing the Group’s Experience with Theoretical Models** – using outside formal concepts to describe what’s going on in a group
- **Providing Feedback based on Observations of Group Process** – sharing personal perceptions about the group’s dynamics in order to facilitate awareness and change

Involving Facilitation Skills

- **Inviting Participation and Interaction** – prompting action, contact, and dialogue
- **Redirecting the Group’s Energy** – shifting focus toward the group
- **Recognizing Commonalities** – finding common ground and identifying group goals
- **Supporting Cooperation** – fostering group unity and cohesion to accomplish tasks
- **Experimenting with New Behavior** – encouraging members to try new things

Planning Facilitation Skills

- **Brainstorming** – identifying multiple possibilities
- **Generalizing** – taking experience from one area and trying it in another
- **Strategizing and Planning for Action** – determining the best way to approach an issue and creating an action plan
- **Taking Action** – putting knowledge into action or taking learning with you
- **Evaluating and Modifying Plans** – assessing effectiveness of group actions
Group Facilitation Stage One:
ENGAGING FACILITATION SKILLS

The first stage of group facilitation is to engage individuals in an interactive group process. A group leader should attempt to create an environment that welcomes new members and invites them into the group. Engagement involves capturing the energy and experience that members bring from their individual past experience. This energy and knowledge can then be used to fuel the activities of the current group and its endeavors. During this stage it is important to actively attend to the way a group comes together for several reasons. Members are more likely to stay in a group and contribute to its purpose if they are invited and welcomed into a group and engaged in the group process. Engaging members in the group lays a firm foundation for later stages of group development. If a potential group member does not feel comfortable in the group the first time they attend, a group facilitator may not get a second chance. First impressions are difficult to change.

In addition, engaging facilitation skills encourage a group member to feel included and valued within the group context. These skills help individuals make the transition from their past experiences into a new context. They help group members reflect on what they already know and prepare them for interactive learning. Engaging skills are used to create curiosity, interest, and energy. They encourage the discovery of personal meaning and interpersonal connections.

If a group leader’s learning style includes a preference for imaginative learning, the importance of these skills may seem self-evident. Imaginative learners appreciate leaders who attend to fostering a personal connection with the group and encourage members to contribute their unique experiences to the current group. If a group leader has a different learning preference, it may be more difficult for that individual to recognize and embrace the importance of engagement. In the role as a leader, though, a good facilitator needs to be aware of how group members’ needs may differ from their own.

Although engaging skills are of critical importance during group formation, engagement should be attended to each time the group meets. A group leader will want to renew an interest in and commitment to the group on an ongoing basis. Engaging individuals in group interaction is an ongoing process that requires maintaining engagement as well as creating it. We have emphasized the importance of welcoming new members; however, holding the interest of old members and ensuring that they remain engaged is equally significant.
Engaging Facilitation Skill # 1:
DEMONSTRATING LEADERSHIP
Letting the group know who’s in charge

Rationale (Why?):
Demonstrating leadership clearly identifies who will serve as the group leader and allows group members to know that someone is in charge who will provide guidance, support, and structure for the group. In many group settings, demonstrating leadership makes participants feel more comfortable, particularly when combined with an overview of the flow of the meeting or activity.

Practice Marker (When?):
When a group forms or re-forms, it is important for the group leader to quickly establish their role. In groups where no one takes a lead role, frequently the members feel uncomfortable and it becomes more difficult to move the group in a productive direction. A group leader needs to begin by immediately establishing the expertise they bring to their role (i.e. their credentials), their investment in accomplishing whatever task or outcome that brings the group together, and an agenda or structure to move the group forward.

Suggestions for Use (How?):
Although commonsensical, the first step in demonstrating leadership is providing a clear introduction of oneself, even if the group members are familiar with each other and you. The second step is to give an overview of what will be happening for that meeting and any future meetings. The third step is to ask if there are questions about the agenda or the function of the group. In the process of demonstrating leadership, it can be beneficial to highlight important resources that will serve the group as it proceeds with the task at hand.

Expected Consequences (What?):
Demonstrating leadership allows the group leader/facilitator to set the tone of the meeting or activity. Undertaking leadership in a positive and commanding, but not authoritative, manner can help focus the energy of the group from its inception. If the group leader can gain the group’s respect for their role at the beginning, frequently the rest of the group process goes more smoothly.

Example:
“Good morning. I am Carolyn Brooks-Harris, and I will be training you in facilitation skills that you will use as you lead your cohorts of freshmen. I have been training peer mentors for over six years.”
Engaging Facilitation Skill # 2:

**CREATING AN OPEN ENVIRONMENT**
Inviting people of be a part of the group

*Rationale:*
A primary task of a group leader is to welcome new members to the group and make them feel included. A facilitator needs to ensure that each member of the group is welcomed and feels that they will be a valued participant in the group’s activities. If a group member has a perception that everyone in the group knows the “secret handshake” and they are being excluded because they are not “in the know,” they will feel like an outsider and may be reluctant to participate. A facilitator also must be aware of cultural differences between group members and actively work towards helping all members feel safe within the context of the group setting.

*Practice Marker:*
Creating an open environment should occur shortly after the group convenes in order to generate positive energy from the start and make sure that everyone feels like they can enter and participate in this group. In an ongoing group, if members seem to be drifting away, a leader can invite the members back into the group or address the issues that are leading to disengagement.

*Suggestions for Use:*
Leaders can do many things to keep the group open and make new members feel included. A leader can monitor the group atmosphere and welcome new members. Too much group closeness, however, can be a threat to an open environment. If a group appears too cohesive, it may discourage new members from feeling welcome. When considering ways to make your group feel open, think about who feels welcome and who does not. This raises the question of diversity. If your group is predominantly Euro-American, how will minorities feel in your group? If your group is predominantly female, will males feel welcome? If most of your members come from wealthy families, will the group feel open to less affluent individuals? When creating an open environment, always consider the kind of diversity you encourage or discourage within your group.

*Expected Consequences:*
The intended outcome of creating an open environment is that *all* members of the group will feel engaged in the group process from the start and, as a result, will be active members who openly contribute to achieving the outcomes/goals that will make the group work successful.

*Example:*
“We’re fortunate enough to have a nice mix of people who were in the group last year as well as many new faces. We’ve heard from many of the ‘old-timers’ but not many of the ‘newcomers.’ If this is your first time here, I’d like to hear why you came and what you’d be interested in doing this year.”
Engaging Facilitation Skill # 3:  
**ENCOURAGING CONNECTIONS**  
Helping people get acquainted and connected

*Rationale:*
In order to feel connected to a group, participants need to get to know one another and see what they have in common. Each of us bring distinct backgrounds, interests, and values with us and will feel more comfortable in groups if we encounter similar others. In order to feel connected to a group, members need to get to know one another and see what they have in common. Unfortunately, similarities are not always readily apparent and part of group facilitation is making it easier for similar people in a group to find each other and to share their common ground in a way that helps them feel invested in the group.

*Practice Marker:*
Encouraging connections should initially occur in the early stages of a group meeting. Providing an opportunity for individual members to become acquainted and begin to identify their commonalities allows the group to loosen up and grow more comfortable in the group setting. If group members conflict or distinct cliques develop, the facilitator will need to bridge the differences by focusing on common areas of agreement and encouraging members to step outside of their “safety zones” and interact with group members they do not know or with whom they do not initially feel comfortable.

*Suggestions for Use:*
In order to encourage connections, a facilitator needs to become familiar with group members by learning about their interests and backgrounds. This process may be easier when working with groups that have a built-in purpose for meeting such as students struggling with study skills and/or time management issues or family members participating in a “parent program.” A facilitator needs to listen carefully to the flow of conversation and, as frequently as possible, point out things that members have in common. The facilitator needs to build in group activities that allow people to share themselves with one another. For example, a facilitator can utilize dyad sharing to create immediate connections between group members that then can be extended to the group. In addition, a facilitator can design activities in which members interact in different smaller groups so that possible connections can be discovered.

*Expected Consequences:*
If a facilitator can successfully create connections between a number of the group participants, a foundation will be laid that will encourage positive and dynamic group interactions. When group members are able to recognize the connections they share, they will be more open to hearing the ideas or recommendations of other group members.

*Example:*
“To start this workshop on time management, I’d like you to pair off with another student. I’ll be asking some questions that I want you to answer with one another. These questions will encourage you to think about your strengths and weaknesses related to time management.”
Engaging Facilitation Skill # 4: BUILDING GROUP RAPPORT
Facilitating a sense of teamwork and unity

Rationale:
One of the challenges of being a group facilitator is creating camaraderie and good will within the group. As a result, a leader must encourage positive interactions that make the participants feel good about being part of the group. If each group member feels connected to only one other, a facilitator has succeeded at encouraging connections but has not yet built group rapport. Group rapport goes beyond individual social contact to create a bond between each member and the group as a whole.

Practice Marker:
Building group rapport, as with the other engaging skills, should be actively pursued by the facilitator in the early stages of group development. The process of generating a sense of teamwork and unity will occur more smoothly if a facilitator has taken the time to enact the previous engaging skill by encouraging connections among group members. Basically, group rapport builds on the connections encouraged by the facilitator.

Suggestions for Use:
One way a facilitator can foster group rapport is through small group activities that allow most group members to know one another more fully. In addition, a group leader can start conversations that will draw in as many members as possible. A facilitator also should ensure that there is a balance between planned and unplanned activities. In other words, a leader needs to have decided on specific activities that will create a sense of unity in the group, but should be open to ideas or activities that spontaneously arise as the facilitator interacts with the group members.

Expected Consequences:
Building group rapport strengthens each member’s commitment to other members of the group and their support of dynamic and open group processes. If a group has bonded, then members will more readily return and participate if the group meets over a period of time.

Example:
“I’m sure we’re all excited and nervous about being mentors for a group of freshmen. One of the ways we can support one another is by being willing to share our happiness, frustrations, and successes as we go through this semester together. We will set aside some time each class session to talk about how things are going in our groups so we can help each other out.”
Engaging Facilitation Skill # 5:
DEFINING GROUP IDENTITY
Establishing the group purpose and personality

Rationale:
Every group has an identity and an atmosphere. A facilitator can set the tone for defining what the group is all about and what it will feel like to be a participant. Most individuals would only want to join a group if they knew the purpose of the group and what it would feel like to be involved. As a result, a key component of group identity is guiding the group in the establishment of a sense of purpose. At the same time, the facilitator needs to foster a “feel” or personality for the group that can be as important a part of its identity as its name or mission statement.

Practice Marker:
Defining group identity can smoothly flow from the process of building group rapport. Once the group has begun to connect to each other, the facilitator can guide the group towards a broader commitment to the whole group and whatever task or function the group has come together to accomplish.

Suggestions for Use:
Strategies to create group identity are fairly common. For example, university sports teams do a lot to foster identity a sense of group identity through uniforms with distinct colors, a strong team name, a bold insignia, and an endearing mascot. Other types of groups may have to rely on more subtle forms of identity, but these often serve the same purpose. Some of the things a facilitator can do to define group identity include the following: choosing an appropriate but “catchy” name for the group; choosing a motto that exemplifies the group purpose; or designing a t-shirt for the group that members can wear to special activities.

Expected Consequences:
When a leader helps a group define its identity, the predicted outcome is a clear sense of purpose and cohesion. Individual members will feel more comfortable and committed to a group if they feel they can a connection to the group as a whole.

Example:
“As peer mentors for this learning community, you have been selected based on your desire to help freshmen make the transition to our university. I have high expectations that we will be able to rely on each other and work as a team throughout the semester.”

Group Facilitation Stage Two:
INFORMING FACILITATION SKILLS

The second stage of group facilitation is referred to as informing the group with relevant knowledge. As a facilitator, this involves managing the flow of information within the group. A leader ensures that a group acquires the facts and wisdom they need to succeed. There will be times when a facilitator needs to provide the group with information that they already know and other times the facilitator will have to seek out the knowledge that the group needs. In addition to a facilitator bringing their own learning to the group, this stage of facilitation also involves gathering information from the group and encouraging the effective exchange of knowledge in a sharing and cooperative atmosphere. Therefore, leadership behavior during this stage will range from being a knowledgeable expert to being a curious detective searching for clues. This entire range of informing facilitation is vital to the success of a group. The ability of the facilitator to manage the flow of information within a group can be a crucial link in empowering the group to fulfill its potential.

Informing the group with relevant knowledge corresponds to the analytic learning style. Group leaders should use informing facilitation skills to attend to the primary needs of analytic learners as well as to foster analytic learning among all members. Analytic learning occurs when group members are encouraged to practice inductive reasoning and build theories. Analytic learning also involves thinking through ideas and constructing hypotheses. To encourage analytic learning, it is important to provide knowledge and data as well as the opportunity to apply that knowledge within the group itself.
Informing Facilitation Skill # 1:  
PROVIDING INFORMATION  
Presenting facts, resources, knowledge, theories, or data

**Rationale (Why?):**
One of the basic tools of group facilitation is providing the group with pertinent information that they do not already have. This information might include facts, resources, knowledge, theories, or data. However, this skill may not be as easy as it seems. A facilitator needs to make sure that they understand what information is necessary before jumping in with answers. Knowing something is only the first step in being able to teach it. Providing information puts the leader in an authoritative role that may detract from positive group dynamics or interactions. In addition, when leaders become less confident with their repertoire of diverse skills, providing information tends to be a fallback position. Facilitators need to be aware that providing information is one of many skills and should not be overused.

**Practice Marker (When?):**
Providing information becomes important if a group does not have enough information to accomplish its goals. The facilitator can directly provide the necessary information or point the group toward other resources that will meet their needs.

**Suggestions for Use (How?):**
A lecture is one of many ways to provide information. Information from outside the group can also be presented through videos, written reports, or structured discussions. Information from inside the group can be provided through brainstorming, group surveys, and questionnaires. Information from both outside and inside the group is usually helpful in most endeavors. A group facilitator will need to manage both types of knowledge.

**Expected Consequences (What?):**
Providing information can empower a group with new knowledge that fosters their ability to proceed with a group activity or guides them as they engage in a decision-making process.

**Example:**
“Studies have found that learning community students tend to persist from freshmen to sophomore year at higher rates than non-learning community students.”
**Informing Facilitation Skill # 2:**

**GATHERING INFORMATION AND EXCHANGING KNOWLEDGE**

Asking questions, gathering data, surveying ideas, and encouraging the exchange of information

**Rationale:**
A facilitator often needs to collect information from the group participants. A group leader may assume that they know more than other group members. Although this assumption often is correct, it may not always be helpful. The group may benefit if the leader looks to the group first to tap its collective wisdom. After gathering information, the facilitator may want to fill in the gaps with their own knowledge. Gathering information allows the facilitator to build group knowledge and to discover new ideas that they may not have considered. Encouraging group members to teach what they know is an important strategy to foster the exchange of knowledge between members.

**Practice Marker:**
The facilitator may find it helpful to gather information at the start of a discussion in order to assess what knowledge base the group members have around the topic area. When the facilitator identifies group members who have more background in a particular area or have slightly different knowledge about a topic than they do, the facilitator can capitalize on the knowledge each participant brings.

**Suggestions for Use:**
A facilitator can ask open-ended questions, survey ideas, or gather data. In addition to asking good questions, there are other ways to solicit information. Conducting a quick survey of everyone in the group can be done by a show of hands or by going around the group. A survey question might be, “How many of us think we should focus on opposing the tuition hike?” (hand survey) or “Where do you think we should go on our Spring Break trip?” (around the group survey). For other more complex issues, it may be helpful to use a questionnaire or other written method to collect more detailed data about the group.

**Expected Consequences:**
If a facilitator gathers information from the group, it will help with group rapport and allow the facilitator to tailor the presentation of information to the group based on an accurate assessment of what the group already knows. By capitalizing on the knowledge that each member brings, the outcome is a group that is fully empowered by its collective wisdom.

**Example:**
“You will be working with your freshmen on study skills and academic success strategies. We’ve reviewed ideas from our textbook; what strategies have you used that you believe would be applicable for your students?”
Informing Facilitation Skill # 3:

**CLARIFYING IDEAS OR CONCEPTS**
Making sure everyone is on the same wavelength

*Rationale:*
Clarifying ideas or concepts involves making sure that there is a common understanding within the group. Complete agreement may not be necessary, but as a group shares information and chooses a direction, the facilitator must confirm that all the group members understand what is being said or agreed on—that everyone is “on the same page.”

*Practice Marker:*
Communication is an imperfect process and what one person intends to express is not always what others understand. Clarification is used to check on the connection between a speaker’s intent and a listener’s perception. If gaps exist between expression and comprehension, the task of the facilitator is to address these gaps before moving on. Within a group context, clarification should be multidirectional. Facilitators need to ensure that they understand the members of the group, that group members understand the facilitator, and that group members understand one another.

*Suggestions for Use:*
Group discussions have natural points of transition from one topic to another. A group leader should use their attending and listening skills to monitor the flow of conversation and to clarify the groups’ understanding of an idea or issue before proceeding to the next topic. At other times, a facilitator may notice subtle or overt signs of confusion or disagreement. The facilitator needs to utilize clarification as an intervention during these times to resolve misunderstandings so that problems do not arise later. Strategies to clarify ideas of concepts include: check-in (“Do you know what I mean?” “Are there any questions?”); play-back (“Tell me what you think I’m saying” “Let me tell you what I think I’m hearing...”); summary (“There are three main ideas I’m trying to communicate. First...Is that clear?”); curiosity (“I’m not sure I understand. Tell me more.”); and, questioning (“Do you mean that you want the group to spend less time on fund-raising and more time on program development?”).

*Expected Consequences:*
When a group leader clarifies ideas or concepts, the expected consequence is mutual perception and an enhanced flow of conversations. Clarification provides an opportunity for important information to be highlighted and reinforced. As a result, more instances arise in which all members of the group can gain a common understanding of a particular topic of discussion.

*Example:*
“Are you saying that the students on campus are uncommitted or are you saying that faculty expectations are too high? I want to understand what you are saying.”
Informing Facilitation Skill # 4:  
CONCEPTUALIZING THE GROUP’S EXPERIENCE WITH THEORETICAL MODELS
Using outside formal concepts to describe what’s going on in a group

Rationale:
Being a facilitator sometimes involves using formal concepts to describe group processes as a way for the group to reflect on itself. Sharing models, theories, or other knowledge can sometimes help a group to understand itself, resolve problems, and make progress. Conceptualizing brings the group’s attention back to the leader. Therefore, a facilitator should carefully observe the group before addressing the group’s experience with outside knowledge. If a group leader can introduce theories, models, or strategies in a thoughtful way, this information can help move the group toward a higher level of learning and performance.

Practice Marker:
Conceptualizing is useful when a group faces a new challenge and is unsure how to proceed. A facilitator may also find it helpful to introduce outside knowledge when the group is stuck and may be struggling to understand itself. At these times, the presentation of conceptual models can provide the group ways to perceive what is going on or options about how to move forward.

Suggestions for Use:
The concepts a facilitator could share with the group might include models of group dynamics or learning styles, problem solving stages or goal setting strategies, or information that is related to the focus of the group. Obviously the concepts that are relevant to a study skills workshop for students will differ from those related to a faculty taskforce looking at retention issues.

Expected Consequences:
When a leader or group member shares conceptual knowledge, it provides an opportunity for the group to reflect on itself in a focused manner. The expected consequence of conceptualizing is that the group will understand itself more clearly and will be able to choose more effective group strategies.

Example:
“Some of you may be familiar with the four stages of group development originally identified by Bruce Tuckman and now called ‘forming, storming, norming, and performing.’ As you listen to what Deirdre is describing in her freshman cluster, what stage do you think they may be in?”
Informing Facilitation Skill # 5:
PROVIDING FEEDBACK BASED ON OBSERVATIONS OF GROUP PROCESS
Sharing personal perceptions about group dynamics in order to facilitate awareness and change

Rationale:
Sometimes it is important for the facilitator to monitor group dynamics and inform the group about itself. One way that this can occur is for a group leader to provide feedback based on observations of group process. Group process refers to patterns of behavior that occur in groups. For example, one member may dominate discussions, two factions may conflict, or the group may get distracted by trivial concerns. When a facilitator observes these (or other) group dynamics, they may find it helpful to share what they perceive in order to facilitate awareness and change.

Practice Marker:
A group leader should monitor the group and watch how members interact. The facilitator should think ahead and try to avoid potential conflicts. When notable patterns emerge, a leader may choose to share this information. However, the facilitator must be cautious about how they describe their perceptions. The leader will need to provide constructive feedback about what makes the group session(s) run smoothly as well as an assessment of obstacles to positive group dynamics and areas for growth.

Suggestions for Use:
Providing feedback is useful when a facilitator observes patterns that block progress or when they observe positive interactions that should be reinforced. When natural breaks in the conversation occur, or at the beginning or end of a meeting, the facilitator may find it helpful to share their observations so that the group can shape its interactions and engage in more productive patterns. These observations can address group characteristics, themes in discussions, or the process of group interaction.

Expected Consequences:
The expected consequence of feedback about process is that that group will be more aware of its dynamics and can make more informed choices about how to interact. Another anticipated result of attending to group dynamics is that the members will respect the group leader and trust his or her guidance.

Example:
“I have noticed that since all of you are strong, efficient communicators, you have learned to rely on those skills to progress in this class. However, when you don’t do the reading, you actually miss some ideas that would strengthen your leadership abilities.”
Group Facilitation Stage Three: INVOLVING FACILITATION SKILLS

One of the hardest jobs of a group facilitator is creating an environment in which all of the members feel comfortable participating. Engaging skills were designed to invite members into a group and to get them comfortable with one another and with the leader. The involving skills described here are intended to maintain a high level of participation. The key is to be able to invite everyone to participate in a way that allows the facilitator to step back and let the group move together. There may be times that the leader needs to jump in and “direct traffic,” but when the group is rolling under its own steam, the leader may want to support this process with gentle encouragement. Ideally, involving skills allow a facilitator to shift from being “a sage on the stage” to being a “guide on the side.”

Involving skills build on informing activities and help participants recognize how much knowledge, formal and informal, they bring to the group. Involving skills will appeal to common sense learners. Group leaders should use involving facilitation skills to attend to the needs of common sense learners and to encourage this type of learning among all the group members. Common sense learning occurs when group members are encouraged to integrate theory and practice as well as applying hands-on learning that often challenges participants to move beyond their comfort zone. Involving facilitation skills strengthens the connections between group members and, as a result, fosters cooperative learning.

Involving skills allow group leaders to encourage members to experiment with new knowledge, practice new skills to improve performance, and to interact with others to support participatory learning.
Involving Facilitation Skill # 1: INVITING PARTICIPATION AND INTERACTION
Prompting action, contact and dialogue

Rationale (Why?):
Inviting participation and interaction allows the leader to encourage group members to talk and work with one another more directly. The facilitator should actively pursue opportunities to help group members learn from one another. Inviting participation and interaction involves seeking input from all members of the group. Recognizing the unique value of group participants is easier with some individuals than with others. The leader may not initially like or enjoy the company of everyone in the group. However, the leader has a responsibility to look at the group and find valuable aspects of each individual. Searching for positive qualities and areas for contribution can draw reluctant members into a group and allow them to blossom and grow.

Practice Marker (When?):
Inviting participation and interaction is useful when full involvement is not naturally occurring. If some group members are dominating a discussion, the facilitator will want to pointedly invite others to contribute their ideas. If energy in the group is low, a leader may want to encourage more active interaction.

Suggestions for Use (How?):
Inviting interaction allows the facilitator to encourage group members to talk and work with one another more directly. The group leader should look for opportunities to help group members connect with each other. This sometimes takes the form of simply asking people to share information: “Tim that’s a great idea! Can you tell Joan more about this?” Other strategies for inviting interaction include breaking into small groups, dyadic sharing, and brainstorming.

Expected Consequences (What?):
When a group leader invites participation and interaction, the intended result will be more complete and equal involvement by all group members. This type of involvement will allow participants to enjoy the group’s interactions and contribute their ideas and energy in a way that will benefit the whole group.

Example:
“Let’s break down into small groups and have each participant share his or her lesson plan. After each person has shared, the others can give suggestions for successful implementation.”
**Involving Facilitation Skill # 2: REDIRECTING THE GROUP’S ENERGY**
Shifting focus away from the leader and in a new direction

**Rationale:**
Two important premises of experiential learning are that the group knows more than it thinks it does and that the leader is not the font of all knowledge. Participants who are used to didactic learning may habitually look to the leader too much. In these situations, it will be important to redirect the energy of the group. Basically, the facilitator will need to deflect this attention and “bounce” the focus or energy back to the group itself to keep interaction and involvement high.

**Practice Marker:**
When a group member asks a question that the leader knows that a group member can answer just as well, then the leader can bounce the question back to the group. This skill is particularly useful after the group has bonded and has grown more confident.

**Suggestions for Use:**
When a leader wants to bounce a question back to the group, it may be helpful to say, “That’s a really good question. Does anyone else have a good answer?” This strategy can also be used when the leader does not want to respond to a controversial question. Group energy can be redirected in several ways: from the leader to the group; from negative to positive; from past to future; from problems to solutions; from the individual to the collective; from status quo to creative solutions.

**Expected Consequences:**
When a group leader bounces back a question to the group, the likely outcome is more group ownership, interactive learning, and involvement. Learners who become involved in this way are likely to feel more invested in what they are learning about or the activity in which they are participating.

**Example:**
“Joshua has said that he doesn’t think the University should require a foreign language. Does someone else want to explain a rationale for this requirement?”
Involving Facilitation Skill # 3:

RECOGNIZING COMMONALITIES AND PROMOTING CONSENSUS
Finding common ground and identifying common goals

Rationale:
Every group will have areas of similarities and areas of differences. Promoting involvement often involves helping participants find similarities in ideas, interests, values, and plans. Focusing on differences may lead to disagreements and conflict rather than finding common ground. Recognizing commonalities and promoting consensus can strengthen and empower a group, support group progress, and the development of common goals.

Practice Marker:
A group can get stuck when members become fixated on their own ideas and focus on areas of disagreement with others. This represents the “storming” stage of group development. When this happens, a group leader needs to suspend group interactions and help the group recognize commonalities and consensus.

Suggestions for Use:
When a group becomes fixated on disagreements, the leader needs to stop the process and spend time overtly identifying areas of agreement and disagreement. Then, the facilitator can ask the group to move beyond disagreements and focus on common ground. Disagreements come in various forms. For example, group members from different cultural backgrounds may look at the same situation from different perspectives. An effective group leader can appreciate different worldviews and look for areas of consensus.

Expected Consequences:
When a group leader guides a group through the process of finding common ground, the predicted outcome is that the group will be able to make progress and put forth decisions that benefit the group as a whole and allow the group to move forward in accomplishing their goals or tasks.

Example:
“There seems to be a disagreement about whether peer mentors should be more like friends or teachers. Perhaps we should spend a few minutes affirming the things we can agree upon about the peer mentor role in relation to the freshmen we’re serving.”
Involving Facilitation Skill # 4:
SUPPORTING COOPERATION AND GROUP COHESION
Fostering group unity and cohesion to accomplish group tasks

Rationale:
A group of people can accomplish more collectively than they can as individuals working separately. Within the context of experiential learning, a key facilitation skill is to encourage supportive interactions and nurture the interdependence of the participants so they feel like they can learn more as a group. Once a group becomes cohesive, there is a sense of safety and inclusivity. The group becomes self-sustaining and the leader does not have to do all the work to support the group process.

Practice Marker:
Cooperation often flows from the discovery of commonalities (see Involving Skill 3). When a group needs to accomplish a difficult or complex task, the facilitator should engage in strategies that will promote cooperation.

Suggestions for Use:
One way a facilitator can foster cooperation is to divide complex goals into small objectives and delegate complementary tasks to different group members. When each person has a task they can accomplish to contribute to the goals, goals are more manageable. Encouraging group members to provide positive feedback also supports cohesion.

Expected Consequences:
The intended outcome of cooperation is group cohesion and productivity. Once a group has become cohesive and attained cooperative goals, it will be better able to move to new goals more smoothly with an expectation of cooperation and success.

Example:
“As you’re planning your fall schedules, I’d like you to pair off with a partner so that you can work together and identify the advantages and disadvantages of the schedules you’ve created.”
Involving Facilitation Skill # 5:

**EXPERIMENTING WITH NEW BEHAVIOR**

Encouraging members to try new things

*Rationale:*
For learning to be truly experiential, group members may need to step out of comfort zones and stretch. The facilitator’s role will be to challenge participants to try new things. Experimenting with new behavior is the next step in the cycle of learning and allows information learned in a group to be actively practiced. Group cohesion supports a safe environment that allows members to try new things.

*Practice Marker:*
When members feel supported by the group and can participate in a cooperative manner, then a facilitator may want to encourage experimentation. Experimentation often is useful at the point that old methods of doing things do not result in desired outcomes.

*Suggestions for Use:*
A group leader can make direct suggestions by asking members to try new things. A gentle nudge from a facilitator can help a participant overcome their reluctance to try something new. In addition, a facilitator can help the group brainstorm new ways of approaching a situation. Experimenting can include role-plays, work sheets, or other exercises as well as simply suggesting alternate behaviors for participants to try.

*Expected Consequences:*
Experimentation is likely to result in increased confidence among individual members and overall growth in the group. Group members are likely to experience growth when the group can provide a safe environment in which the group supports new behavior rather than inhibiting it.

*Example:*
“Now that we’ve discussed several different assertiveness strategies, I’d like for us to do some role-plays to practice applying these ideas to your position as a peer mentor. Who would like to try the first role-play?”
Group Facilitation Stage Four:
PLANNING FACILITATION SKILLS

The final stage of group facilitation builds a bridge for group participants from learning acquired through group membership to direct application. The five planning facilitation skills provide a template for a group leader to move the group systematically and thoroughly from planning to action. For stand-alone workshops, the facilitator will emphasize goal setting and action plans that participants will pursue once the session has ended. For long-term groups or committees, the emphasis will be on planning and direct application as well as an assessment of the action to which the group commits. The group will benefit from coming back together and evaluating the challenges or successes of their activities in order to affirm learning gained from group processes and/or to modify future plans.

Planning facilitation skills appeal to dynamic learners who are action oriented and have a preference for immediate application of knowledge to various situations. Planning skills are used to encourage group members to set goals based on group learning, planning for specific action, and apply lessons learned from the group to other contexts. Planning activities complete the experiential cycle of learning and allow participants to begin the cycle again.
Planning Facilitation Skill # 1:

BRAINSTORMING
Identifying multiple possibilities

Rationale (Why?):
Individuals and groups commonly make the same mistake when trying to solve problems: they choose the first solution that comes to mind. One key to effective planning or problem solving is for a facilitator to encourage creative thinking and the generation of multiple possibilities before deciding on a course of action. The group must be reminded to generate these ideas in a non-evaluative manner. Brainstorming allows a group to think of a diverse and large number of ideas in a short period of time without rejecting ideas too quickly.

Practice Marker (When?):
When facing a new situation that requires the group to decide on a course of action, brainstorming can be used to encourage creative problem-solving. Brainstorming also can be used when a group feels stuck and unable to progress. In this situation, a facilitator can use this structured method to move the group forward.

Suggestions for Use (How?):
When facilitating the brainstorming process, the facilitator should begin by defining the problem that needs to be solved. Then, the most important part is to encourage the group to identify multiple possibilities using as much creativity as possible. During this time, ideas should not be edited or evaluated. The facilitator should not be afraid of long silences; some group members may need time to formulate their ideas. A leader may prompt the group by asking, “What else?” and making sure all members have had an opportunity to contribute to the brainstorming process.

Expected Consequences (What?):
If a facilitator allows brainstorming to occur in its fullest form, the intended result is the generation of creative solutions. Ideally, the brainstorming process becomes synergistic and one member’s ideas will spark other insights and encourage other members to contribute their creativity. When this happens, the group may begin to flow together to create effective new solutions.

Example:
“We need to think of some possible ideas for games at the freshman learning community picnic. Let’s make a list of lots of alternatives before discussing which ideas we like the most.”
Planning Facilitation Skill # 2:  
**GENERALIZING**
Taking experience from one area and trying it in another

*Rationale:*
When planning for application, a facilitator should help a group tap into knowledge they already possess. Group members may be able to take lessons they have learned in the past and generalize them to the present challenge. Sometimes, the learning being generalized is formal knowledge that members easily will connect to the current situation. At other times, however, the lessons that need to be generalized are informal knowledge and the connection with the current situation may be more difficult to recognize. Therefore, helping a group generalize may involve a creative search for connections on the part of the group leader.

*Practice Marker:*
After brainstorming, the facilitator may find it helpful to search for prior learning or successful behavior from one area and identify how it might be applicable to the current situation.

*Suggestions for Use:*
In order to encourage generalization, a group leader can ask stimulus questions that help group members search for applicable knowledge. For example, “Have any of you encountered similar situations in the past?” “What solutions did you try?” “Were these strategies successful?”

Generalization is a skill in which a facilitator should closely monitor group conversations. If the leader is familiar with the background of group members, they will be more prepared to encourage generalization. Each group member may have transferable skills into which the group can tap. For example, a group leader might say, “George, I know you previously worked in marketing. Based on this experience, do you have any ideas that might help us now?”

*Expected Consequences:*
If a leader encourages generalization, then the group will have a larger knowledge base to draw upon. Generalization stimulates and expands the search for solutions and the origination of new ideas. If group members share knowledge from past experience, plans are more likely to succeed.

*Example:*
“Now that we’ve identified strategies that we used to achieve similar goals in the past, let’s see which of these strategies will help you achieve the goals you’ve set for creating the kind of dynamics you want with your group?”
Planning Facilitation Skill # 3:  
STRATEGIZING AND PLANNING FOR ACTION  
Determining the best way to approach an issue and create an action plan

Rationale:  
Once a group has brainstormed possibilities and reflected on past success, the next step in planning is determining the best way to approach an issue. Strategizing involves considering long-term goals and choosing the most appropriate actions that are likely to accomplish these goals. Strategizing and planning allows a group leader to move the group toward action and to optimize the chances for success.

Practice Marker:  
When a group is preparing to take action, then a facilitator can help the group by moving to the strategizing and planning stage. Ideally, a group should engage in brainstorming and generalization before planning specific actions.

Suggestions for Use:  
Strategizing often results in a concrete action plan. The facilitator can help the group plan different tasks that will be accomplished by different members of the group. Action plans may also involve a timeline for individual and group tasks.

Expected Consequences:  
The intended outcome of strategizing is an effective plan that the group can implement. When a leader helps a group choose strategies based on brainstorming and generalization, then the group’s plan will be more likely to succeed. Strategizing often results in each member knowing what they need to do individually to contribute to the group’s collective success.

Example:  
“Now that we have listed all of the activities that need to occur for Saturday’s learning community picnic, let’s identify which of the peer mentors will be responsible for each task. Let’s start by identifying someone with a car that can pick up the food…”
Planning Facilitation Skill # 4:  
**TAKING ACTION**  
Putting knowledge into action

**Rationale:**  
The ultimate goal of planning is action. If a facilitator has done a good job and encouraged brainstorming, generalizing, strategizing, and planning for action, then the group will be ready for action and committed to its plan. In some settings (such as ongoing groups), action will occur within the life of the group. In other situations (such as stand-alone workshops), action may occur after the group has disbanded. Therefore, the last two planning strategies will not always be facilitated within the group. When action occurs after a group has disbanded, the leader may want to prepare group members for individual action in the future.

**Practice Marker:**  
Once planning has occurred, then a group is ready to take action. A facilitator should discourage premature action before effective planning has taken place.

**Suggestions for Use:**  
Taking action is a chance for group members to take all they have learned and translate knowledge into effective behaviors. While action is occurring, a group leader may be in the thick of things or may be coaching from the sidelines. When group members are taking action, a facilitator should encourage individuals to remember the plans that have been made as well as to be flexible enough to adapt to unforeseen circumstances. However, this type of adaptation should not undermine the group’s agreed-upon goals.

**Expected Consequences:**  
When action takes place, it is a validation of the group’s collective work and an expression of the group’s identity. Although action is the ultimate goal of experiential learning, the implementation of plans provides another opportunity for the group to learn together. Inevitably, some plans will work better than others and an effective facilitator can help the group learn from both successes and failures.

**Example:**  
“I thought this would be a good time to bring the group back together to discuss our progress. I’d like you to pull out the action plan worksheet you’ve used this week to implement new study skill strategies for each of your classes and discuss your successes and challenges in enacting your plan.”
Planning Facilitation Skill # 5:

EVALUATING AND MODIFYING PLANS

Assessing the effectiveness of group actions

Rationale:
Once plans have been implemented, a facilitator may want to help the group assess the effectiveness of their actions. The purpose of evaluations is to modify and improve group learning for future action. Evaluation allows a group to reflect on their successes and on what they might do differently in similar situations in the future. This type of reflection completes the cycle of experiential learning as groups move from concrete experience back to reflective observation.

Practice Marker:
After action has begun, the facilitator may want to encourage the group to reflect on its progress and modify plans, if necessary. After actions are complete, a more thorough assessment may be useful.

Suggestions for Use:
As a facilitator you may want to work with the group to decide what kind of evaluation might be most helpful. For example, evaluations can be formal or informal; they can include qualitative or quantitative data; and they can occur during or after the group’s action. The facilitator needs to help the group determine which type of evaluation will meet the needs of a particular situation. After a group has reflected on the success or failure of its plans, then the leader should ensure that evaluative data is used to plan for future action.

Expected Consequences:
Evaluating plans during an activity can allow flexibility in responding to changing circumstances. After group action, an evaluation process validates the group’s accomplishments. Reflecting on action can help a group refine their efforts for future activities and increase the likelihood of further success. Evaluative data also can be used to demonstrate group effectiveness to individuals outside of the group.

Example:
“We’ve come to the point where it would be beneficial to evaluate the strategies we identified for teaching time management workshops to student athletes before we move on to our next set of students. George recommended an informal sharing of the strategies the students responded to and those they didn’t. Kalani would like us only to focus on the ratings provided by the students after the workshop. Both are beneficial, why don’t we start with an informal discussion and then look at the evaluations of the workshops.”
GROUP ACTIVITIES FOR EACH STAGE OF GROUP FACILITATION

Examples of Engaging Group Activities

1. **Icebreakers** are brief interactive exercises to encourage and prepare for interpersonal learning during the workshop. These activities may or may not be related to the workshop topic. **Example:** Participants have the names of famous people taped on their backs so that others can read their identity but they cannot. They are asked to mingle with others and ask “yes or no” questions until they discover their own identity.

2. **Motivation Grabbers** are short topic-relevant activities that increase participants’ motivation to think and learn about a new topic. **Example:** Having participants share in dyads the answers to several sentence stems related to the workshop topic. An example of a sentence stem related to a workshop on self-esteem might be: “I feel best about myself when...”

3. **Stimulus Role-Plays** are pre-planned role-plays structured by facilitators and presented to workshop participants that are meant to stimulate thinking about a topic and provide a relevant example to reflect upon. **Example:** At the beginning of a workshop about sexual orientation, facilitators role-play a discussion between a gay or lesbian person and a coworker who asks questions about their personal life assuming that they are heterosexual.

4. **Gallery Exercises** are used to prompt reflection on a workshop topic. Pictures related to the workshop theme are displayed and participants are asked to respond to the images. **Example:** In an alcohol awareness workshop, images of alcohol from the media and advertising are displayed in order to highlight how we are taught to think about alcohol. Participants are asked to write their responses on Post-It notes next to the pictures.

5. **Guided Fantasies** are used to assist participants in imagining scenarios related to the workshop topic. Participants are asked to relax and close their eyes, and the facilitator verbally encourages them to imagine different scenes and experiences. **Example:** In a career decision making workshop, participants are asked to imagine a day in the future. The facilitator guides participants through different parts of the day related to work and personal life.

Examples of Informing Group Activities

1. **Lectures** are used to provide factual content information about the workshop topic. **Example:** In a stress management workshop, the facilitator provides factual information about the physiological effects of anxiety.

2. **Group Surveys** are a way to provide participants with topic-relevant information about the group itself. **Example:** In a sexual assault prevention workshop, participants’ attitudes are surveyed using a brief instrument, results are tallied and feedback is given to the audience highlighting gender differences in attitudes.

3. **Questionnaires / Instruments** allow participants to gain new knowledge about themselves. **Example:** In a staff development workshop, the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator is used to explore personality type and how it impacts the work setting.

4. **Demonstrations** allow a facilitator to demonstrate a new behavior or skill so that participants can learn by observation. **Example:** In a cooking workshop, the facilitator shows the participants how to melt sugar without burning it.

5. **Modeling Role-Plays** are used to demonstrate effective behavior related to the workshop topic. **Example:** In an assertiveness workshop, facilitators demonstrate assertive behavior.

6. **Case Studies** are accounts of actual events related to workshop topics that are used to prompt exploration discussion. **Example:** In a fraternity leadership workshop, reports of incidents involving hazing and alcohol use are used to promote discussion.

7. **Movement / Sorting** exercises have people move to different areas of a room to increase awareness of individual differences and encourage reflection on previous experiences related to the workshop topic. **Example:** In a multicultural workshop, members of different oppressed groups are asked to move to another side of the room.

8. **Handouts** are concise, written summaries of material related to the workshop topic. **Example:** A summary of topic-relevant facts and statistics are presented during a workshop.

Examples of Involving Group Activities

1. **Practice Role-Plays** are used to practice new behavior related to the workshop topic. Example: In a social skills workshop, participants are encouraged to practice different ways of meeting new people.

2. **Simulations** are used to present realistic situations so that participants can practice using knowledge related to the workshop topic. Example: In a leadership workshop, participants are asked to play the roles of members of a selection committee and make decisions about fictitious applicants.

3. **Worksheets** require participants to use knowledge in a written format. Example: In a time management workshop, participants complete a weekly schedule in order to learn how to budget their time.

4. **Structured Discussions** provide an organized way for participants to share their ideas in an interactive manner. Example: Participants are asked a series of questions that progressively lead from information to practical application.

5. **Art Work** is used to allow workshop participants to creatively access and express their ideas and experiences related to a workshop topic. Example: In a family dynamics workshop, participants are asked to draw a picture of their family. They can represent their family either realistically or symbolically including relationships and dynamics with the use of different colors and shapes.

6. **Scenarios** are exemplary situations that provide specific examples with stimulus questions and are used to activate learning in structured discussions. Example: As a part of a sexual assault prevention workshop, a scenario of two college students on a date is presented. As different stages of the date are described, participants are asked stimulus questions related to communication, decision making, and consent.

7. **Skits** are short dramatic presentations that demonstrate or exemplify lessons related to workshop content. Example: In a learning styles workshop, a scene from the Wizard of Oz is enacted to represent the way that different individuals have different needs.

Examples of Planning Group Activities

1. **Personal Practice of Skills** provides an opportunity for participants to incorporate knowledge from the workshop into their own personal behaviors. Most workshops will not allow for “real” practice to occur that is not role-playing. However, it is possible to plan for personal practice and anticipate future opportunities for practice. **Example:** In a couples’ communication workshop, spouses practice problem-solving with one another using skills learned in the workshop.

2. **Action Plans** offer participants the opportunity to contract with each other and the facilitators to take knowledge gained in the workshop and apply it to their outside lives. **Example:** In a time management workshop, participants make plans to complete a project such as a research paper that is actually due in one of their classes. They use techniques learned in the workshop and set small realistic goals recording these goals on a calendar provided in workshop handouts.

3. **Goal Setting** involves stating specific, measurable goals and dates when those goals are expected to be accomplished. This specificity increases the likelihood that application will occur. **Example:** In a job search workshop, participants will set goals for when they will write their resume and how many jobs they will apply for each week.

4. **Brainstorming Solutions** can be used as a way for the group to cooperate in identifying possible solutions to an individual or collective difficulty. **Example:** In a social skills workshop, participants are asked to brainstorm places where they can meet new people and apply the skills they have learned in the workshop.

5. **Homework** can be used to provide participants the opportunity to apply knowledge they have learned from the workshop after they leave. **Example:** After a relaxation workshop, participants are asked to use techniques they have learned when experiencing anxiety.

**Action Plan & Worksheets**

*Enhancing Educational Effectiveness*

Carolyn N. Brooks-Harris & Jeff E. Brooks-Harris

**ACTION PLAN PART ONE:**

**Understanding Workshop Participants Using Learning Styles**

1. My own learning style is:
   - a. Imaginative
   - b. Analytic
   - c. Common Sense
   - d. Dynamic

2. It is easiest for me to understand the needs of the following learners:
   - a. Imaginative
   - b. Analytic
   - c. Common Sense
   - d. Dynamic

3. I would like to learn ways to improve my ability to work with these learners:
   - a. Imaginative
   - b. Analytic
   - c. Common Sense
   - d. Dynamic

4. I can use the concept of learning styles to enhance my work with students in the following ways:
ACTION PLAN PART TWO: Facilitation Skills and Experiential Learning

1. As a workshop facilitator, I feel most comfortable utilizing the following type(s) of skills:
   a. Engaging  
b. Informing  
c. Involving  
d. Planning

2. I would like to increase my use of and comfort with the following type(s) of skills:
   a. Engaging  
b. Informing  
c. Involving  
d. Planning

3. For example, here are some facilitation skills that I would like to try from each of the four stages of group facilitation:
   a. Engaging: ____________________________________________________________
   b. Informing: __________________________________________________________
   c. Involving: __________________________________________________________
   d. Planning  __________________________________________________________

4. I anticipate using some of these skills when I facilitate the following groups:

5. I can also improve my facilitation skills by applying the following ideas:
ACTION PLAN PART THREE:
Engaging Facilitation Skills

For each of the following skills, please think about your role as a facilitator and write down an example of something you could say or do that demonstrates this skill.

**Demonstrating Leadership** - letting the group know who’s in charge

________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________

**Creating an Open Environment** - inviting people to be a part of the group

________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________

**Encouraging Connections** - helping people get acquainted and connected

________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________

**Building Group Rapport** - facilitating a sense of teamwork and unity

________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
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**Defining Group Identity** - establishing the group purpose and personality

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ACTION PLAN PART FOUR:
Informing Facilitation Skills

For each of the following skills, please think about your role as a facilitator and write down an example of something you could say or do that demonstrates this skill.

**Providing Information** – presenting facts, resources, knowledge, theories, or data

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**Gathering Information and Exchanging Knowledge** – asking questions, gathering data, surveying ideas, and encouraging the exchange of information

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**Clarifying Ideas or Concepts** – making sure everyone is on the same wavelength

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**Conceptualizing the Group’s Experience with Theoretical Models** – using outside formal concepts to describe what’s going on in a group

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**Providing Feedback based on Observations of Group Process** – sharing personal perceptions about the group’s dynamics in order to facilitate awareness and change

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ACTION PLAN PART FIVE:
Involving Facilitation Skills

For each of the following skills, please think about your role as a facilitator and write down an example of something you could say or do that demonstrates this skill.

**Inviting Participation and Interaction** – prompting action, contact and dialogue

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**Redirecting the Group’s Energy** – shifting focus away from the leader toward the group

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**Recognizing Commonalities** – finding common ground and identifying common goals

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**Supporting Cooperation** – fostering group unity and cohesion to accomplish group tasks

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**Experimenting with New Behavior** – encouraging members to try new things

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ACTION PLAN PART SIX:
Planning Facilitation Skills

For each of the following skills, please think about your role as a facilitator and write down an example of something you could say or do that demonstrates this skill.

**Brainstorming** – identifying multiple possibilities

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**Generalizing** – taking experience from one area and trying it in another

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**Strategizing for Planning and Action** – determining the best way to approach an issue and create an action plan

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**Taking Action** – putting knowledge into action or taking learning with you

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**Evaluating and Modifying Plans** – assessing effectiveness of group actions

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REFERENCES


Contact Information

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